Tasting the Coffee

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by ShadeCrawler

Summary

Things should be calming down now that Shouta knows Midoriya's secret. But his work is not over yet. Add in someone from Shouta's past returning and Shouta isn't having the best week.

It started with a simple comment from Nemuri.

"Oh, I got myself a new assistant!" She was lounging on Shouta's couch, holding onto his foot as she carefully applied a coat of red nail polish to his nails. The two of them were spending their rare free time together while Hizashi was out on his patrol. Nemuri had walked into the apartment to Shouta reading incident report after incident report from Aldera High school and insisted on the man taking a break before he *literally* burst into flames from the sheer anger coming from him. He hadn't wanted to but Nemuri insisted so here Shouta was, grading papers and letting Nemuri paint his nails as she gossiped. The incident reports would still be there once she left. Shouta hummed in vague interest. There was a stack of papers in his lap and he was going over his Problem Child's recently handed in paper on Underground heroics. The essay was soaked in the same wistfulness that Shouta had noticed from their conversation in his office. He was going to have to deal with that soon. "She's a gem, I swear. She's got a mouth on her too. You'd like her."

Shouta rolled his eyes. "I'm sure," he said dryly. Nemuri was always throwing sharp-tongued people at him in the hopes that he'd make friends with one of them. It rarely worked. "That's what you said about the last one."

Nemuri pointed the brush at him, ignoring his hissed comment about being careful about the couch. Not that it mattered. The couch had been with him and Hizashi since they had first moved in together over ten years ago and there were so many stains on it that it wouldn't matter if a bit of nail polish got on there too. "You took one look at their All Might hoodie and considered them a lost cause from the start, don't deny it." Shouta wouldn't dare. Anyone who was a grown adult and didn't see the flaws in All Might *was* a lost cause, no way around it. "And you're lucky. This one avoids those with big flashy quirks. It's why she joined my team, I think." Nemuri shrugged and returned to brushing Shouta's toenails. "Either way, she's a good one. Laid the smackdown on some creep eyeing me up when we were out for lunch. Nearly threw her ramen at him when he tried getting a bit too close. I'm gonna keep her."

"Good for you," Shouta hummed, but glanced up at her in concern at the 'getting too close' comment. He looked back down at Problem Child's paper when she waved him off. "This assistant got a name? Or am I just gonna have to keep calling her Assistant?" He eyed the bit of the essay where Midoriya wrote about how

Underground heroes could be considered more efficient with fighting crime because they weren't concerned with the camera as several Limelight heroes. There were heroes listed and instances where they showed off for the cameras and people ended up getting hurt. Interesting opinion. One that Shouta agreed with. He'd have to go over this with Midoriya later. Float the idea of joining the lessons that Shouta had with Shinsou. Shinsou could use a friend and Midoriya could use someone who thought like him.

"You're going to call her that anyway and we both know it. But her name's Boukyaku Sakura."

Shouta froze, his pen freezing above the paper.

A little pink-haired girl who stared up at Shouta from the ground with tear-stained cheeks and a boot print pressed into his cheek. Her leg was twisted wrong and one of her shoes and socks had cruelly tossed aside, revealing the extra-long pinky toe. "Aizawa-senpai," she sobbed, "help. Please."

"Shouta?" Nemuri leaned forward, a concerned frown on her lips. "What's wrong? Do you know her or something? You've gone pale."

Shouta clenched his jaw and shook his head, keeping his eyes focused on a small spelling mistake in Problem Child's paper. One mistake in an otherwise perfect essay. "Yes," he said with forced casualness, pushing through the guilt that was rising and threatening to make him choke. An image of little Sakura rose in his mind, how she sat with him at lunch and neither of them said a word to each other. Two children too afraid to even try and make friends with each other in case it went poorly. "Elementary school." He forced himself to relax a little and circled the spelling mistake with his red pen and then flipped to the front page to write Problem Child's grade of 99% at the top. He paused before going on to write a little 'Good Job' there as well. Midoriya needed more encouragement. "She was two grades below me."

Nemuri grinned and leaned forward. "Ohhh, she must've been something for you to remember her all the way from elementary school. Were the two of you friends? Or," she paused and trailed off meaningfully, arching an eyebrow. Shouta had never outright stated to her that he had been bullied before Yuuei but Nemuri was smart enough to catch the hints that he had dropped over the years. Shouta shook his head to her silent question. "Didn't think so," she hummed.

“If you and she went to school together, then you know that she’s quirkless.”

“I do.”

“I doubt that if there was any bullying going on that she was the one doing it.”

Shouta silently shook his head. He put Midoriya’s paper aside and grabbed Yaoyorozu’s paper to go through next.

Nemuri arched an eyebrow. “And I *know* that you would never bully anyone.” She patted his knee in apology at Shouta’s insulted glance up. “So, how do you know her so well? Were the two of you friends after all?”

Shouta swallowed back the guilt and circled a grammar mistake, pressing the pen a little harder than needed. “Stay in your lane on this one, Nemuri,” he said simply. “It’s none of your business.”

“Ohhhh, stay in my lane?” She smirked and leaned forward. “Haven’t heard that since High School. Whatever must’ve happened between the two of you must’ve been juicy.” There was a layer of concern in her eyes, looking Shouta over like she could pry the secret out of him with her eyes alone. She had looked at him like that ever since they had met in High School. “You sure you don’t wanna share, Shouchan?”

“That’s ‘Zashi’s name for me. Not yours.” It was a token protest. It was the name that all of Shouta’s friends used for him. Hizashi was just the person who Shouta liked hearing it from the most.

“I could call you Kitten instead? That’s a cute nickname.”

Shouta wrinkled his nose. “Never mind. Go with Shouchan.” Kitten actually *was* Hizashi’s secret petname for him and Shouta didn’t feel like sharing with Nemuri. “And no, I don’t. Nothing happened. We were just two bullied kids who happened to know each other. That’s all.”

Two bullied kids who wanted to be friends with each other but didn’t know how to make the first step. Why didn’t Shouta make the first step? He should’ve made the first step.

There was a beat of silence where Shouta was sure that Nemuri was going to push. But she just shrugged and screwed the lid back on

the red nail polish, putting it aside and grabbing another with white nail polish. She switched the foot she was holding with the one with dried nail polish on it, probably to start brushing designs on top of the red coat. “Okay. You know where to find me if you wanna talk about it.”

“I won’t.”

“Alright. So, how’s your investigation into Aldera and Bakugou going?”

Shouta relaxed and breathing became a little easier. He pushed back the feelings of guilt, shame, and *why didn’t I do more for her* and forced himself to speak. “Good. I got the footage from Aldera the other day and me and Hizashi will spend the weekend going over them. I can’t do anything about Bakugou until we do and there’s too much of it to sit down and do it until Friday night. But I moved him with Todoroki in the seating chart and I made a note that him and Midoriya aren’t to be paired up anymore under any circumstances, I’ve also been keeping a close eye on him.”

Already, he knew that Hizashi would most likely be getting a new student in his 1-C class and that Shinsou would be moved up to 1-A sooner than planned, and that was only if Bakugou wasn’t expelled altogether. But he wouldn’t be staying in the heroics department. He had only needed to glance at an incident report where Midoriya had claimed that Bakugou had used his quirk on him and remember those little starburst scars on his arms to know that. It had made him remember a kid in his class who could heat up the tips of his fingers. Not a fire quirk, not really, but it sure had fucking hurt when he had pressed his fingers to the back of Shouta’s neck. The scars were still there, hidden under Shouta’s long curtain of hair like Problem Child’s were hidden under his sleeves and shirt.

How many scars did Sakura have?

Nemuri nodded, holding onto Shouta’s big toe carefully as she started to carefully brush a design on it. Probably a snowflake or a cat face or something. “I think that Midoriya told Todoroki about being a false negative and how people treated him because of it.” Shouta nodded. The idea to present Problem Child as someone who had been misdiagnosed as quirkless had been Midoriya’s. There were some people who had the extra jointed pinky toe and still developed quirks. Less than 1% but they were there. Midoriya was just one of those rare cases that had a repressed quirk and had been misdiagnosed as

quirkless. Nothing more. The teachers had been informed of this and Nezu had given him a knowing look but said nothing. All Might wasn't there at all having taken a trip to I-island. Shouta hadn't had his talk with him yet but he would be the moment that the man stepped foot back in Japan. "I was supervising their quirkless sparing today and we were doing this round-robin style thing, y'know? And Todoroki was chosen first and Bakugou was on the other end of the list that I just threw together, so the kid would've had to win against every other person to fight Bakugou. I've never seen the kid fight so hard and when he finally got Bakugou as an opponent? The kid went so fucking hard. Didn't give Bakugou a chance to even fight back, it was so brutal and ***fucking*** *awesome."*

Todoroki was a good friend for Problem Child. The kid looked at Midoriya like he had hung the sun and moon for Todoroki himself and Todoroki would undoubtedly hide a body if Midoriya asked him to. His protective nature over Midoriya had heightened a few days ago without any explanation. But Shouta knew why. Another person knew about One for All. "The kid's like you," he said with a shrug. "He's ride or die."

"Good," Nemuri hummed. Her face softened. "Boukyaku-chan told me what it was like for her growing up quirkless. If it was anything like that for Midoriya then the kid needs people like me in his corner."

Shouta clenched his jaw at the thought of Sakura's brief time at his elementary school and nodded. He kept his gaze on Yaoyorozu's paper, but he wasn't taking any of the words in. He could feel Nemuri's eyes locked on him and a second later the papers were out of his lap and her feet were instead. "If you're not going to talk about it then do my nails," she said sternly as she moved onto another one of Shouta's toes. "You're not doing any good by stewing there. Focus on making my toes look pretty. I want the glittery nail polish, Shouchan."

Shouta rolled his eyes but grabbed the bottle of pink, glittery nail polish anyway. "Fine, fine," he muttered, ignoring the warm feeling that was growing in his chest. "Just keep drawing cats on mine, 'Muri. And tell me other stories of my kids kicking ass." He hummed as Nemuri launched into a story about Kaminari and Aoyama working together flawlessly to defeat Sero and Ashido in an exercise and pushed the thought of Boukyaku Sakura to the back of his mind.

There was something about Aizawa Shouta that all of his closest friends knew. The man always blames himself for never doing enough. The man would take a bullet for someone and then feel bad about getting blood on the person's clothes. It never mattered to him what he had been going through at the time. All that mattered to him was what he hadn't done. When he remembered Boukyaku Sakura, he didn't think of all the times that he stopped her from being bullied or the time that he came to her aid immediately after finding her with a broken leg. He didn't think of how he had never had a friend before and was too scared to reach out to the younger girl to try and make one, even if it would've helped them both. He thought of how he could've done more. How Sakura had been a child without a single friend in a world where everything was against her

He neglected to considered that he had been one too.

There was another thing that Shouta's closest friends knew about him. And that was that the man would do anything to avoid a situation he didn't want to be in. The morning after his conversation with Nemuri, Shouta proved that by diving out of a window so he wouldn't have to face Boukyaku Sakura.

He had stopped by Nemuri's agency before morning classes to drop off his written report about a case that the two of them had collaborated on. A drug ring. It had been a simple case, the two of them getting it wrapped up in just a few nights. The written report was a pain in the ass to write, especially since he still had so many essays to finish grading. But he had finished it up after Nemuri had left the night before and was now sleepily trudging through the halls of her agency after dropping the report off at her office. It was early, too fucking early in Shouta's opinion. He had homeroom in just an hour to get to and he had barely gotten five hours sleep. But the moment he spotted that splash of pink hair out of the corner of his eye, all tiredness fled him, and his head snapped around to see Boukyaku Sakura in all of her glory.

She was no longer that small girl that he remembered. She was taller, for one, but not much. She was about the same height as Shouta's Problem Child. He distantly thought that it made sense, the two of them both being quirkless and Quirkless people usually being smaller than the average Quirked person. She also wore a pair of glasses, something that Shouta didn't remember her having in elementary. She was wearing a professional outfit of black dress pants

and a green blouse. She looked good. She was *alive.*

Shouta had thought of her when he read the statistics on Quirkless people once. He had wondered if Sakura was still alive or if she had died in the multiple ways that Quirkless people were known to. But here she was. Alive and well and working in his best friend's agency. And Shouta had no idea what to say to her after all this time. After years of thinking of what he would say to her if they had ever met again (*I'm sorry I never tried being your friend. I wanted to, I just never had one before and I didn't know how to go about it. Every time I thought of reaching out I'd think of the kids who pretended to be my friend and then kick me when I was down, and I chickened out. I'd like to be friends now, if you were okay with that.)* his mind went completely blank. So, when her gaze started to drift up from her phone, Shouta's mind was screaming out the words "***Awkward situation incoming, get the fuck out of there***" and suddenly Shouta was diving out of the nearest window.

Hizashi and Nemuri could never hear about this, Shouta realized as he dropped out of the second-floor window and onto a lamppost. They never let him hear the end of it. He glanced back up at the window and half expected to see Sakura looking down at the crazy man who had jumped out of the window. But she wasn't there. She must've not seen him. Shouta sighed in relief and slid down the lamppost to the ground. Thankfully, it was early enough that there was no one on the street to question exactly what Shouta had just done. He stuck his hands into his pockets and walked down the sidewalk with the feeling of a weight pressing down on his shoulders. Shouta found himself thinking of what he could've said to Sakura if he had just stuck around a few seconds longer and internally cursed his brain. Of course, it only started working when he didn't fucking need it to.

A buzzing from his phone distracted him from his thoughts and pulled it out, pushing the thought of what he should've said out of his mind. It was a text from Shinsou, asking if they were still going to be training after classes. Shouta sent back an affirmation and, after a pause, asked him if he would feel comfortable with Midoriya joining them. Shouta barely had to wait a minute before Shinsou texted back, [Mr. Bone Breaker? Heck yeah, I don't mind doing training with him. We talk sometimes. Not a lot, since we have different classes, but enough that I know that he's cool.]

Excellent. At first Shouta had this aspect of his life under control. Now to just ask Midoriya if he wanted to take lessons in Underground

heroics with Shinsou and hope that the kid said yes. And if he did, keep him and Shinsou from causing too much trouble when they inevitably became best friends. A part of Shouta dreaded the chaos the two of them were going to case. Another part couldn't want to see it.

Problem Child not only jumped at the chance to take extra lessons but jumped into it with as much determination and enthusiasm as he did with everything he ever did. Which meant that Shinsou, with his competitive nature, matched it 100%. Which meant that by the end of the first lesson, Shouta was completely and utterly exhausted.

Mentally anyway. He had spent Problem Child's first lesson in Underground heroics strolling around a fake city casually as the two teens were given the task of stalking him and attempting to get the drop on him. Shinsou was coming along nicely, doing much better than he had at the start of his lessons. And Midoriya was surprisingly good at the exercise, being quiet and able to blend into shadows easily enough. And between Shinsou's slyness and Midoriya's cleverness, the two of them had actually put together a smart plan which had led to Shouta being steered into a dead end and the two teens dropping down from the rooftops to fight him. It was good. There were things to work on, of course. Shinsou was still a little clumsy with his capture scarf and Midoriya could use some self-confidence. The plan could've gone better if Midoriya hadn't second-guessed himself a few times during it. And they both needed a little work in being casual while stalking someone. If it had been real life, the person they were following would've noticed them immediately. But it was little things that Shouta could teach them and the two of them could help each other on. It had been a good attempt either way. Of course, the plan hadn't worked. Shouta fought with them both for a few minutes until they slipped up, wrapped them up in his capture scarf, and then dragged them back to the entrance of the fake city. There wasn't a drop of sweat on him. But that couldn't be said for his two students.

"Dammit," Shinsou sighed, limp in his capture scarf and letting his teacher drag him back to the entrance. He was used to this treatment by now. "I really thought that would work."

"Sorry," Midoriya said softly. Shouta glanced back behind his shoulder to see Midoriya not meeting Shinsou's eyes and looking a little dejected at their failure. "I really thought that the plan would work too. I should've realized that Sensei would've been better suited

to fighting in close quarters than out in the open."

Shouta stayed quiet but only because Shinsou was rolling his eyes and wriggling his hand out of the capture scarf to flick Midoriya gently on the side of his head. "I agreed to the plan, Bone Breaker. It's not your fault that it went sideways. Besides, Sensei makes me do this exercise, like, twice a week. We'll figure something out before the next time we do this." The boy hesitated before asking, "You are gonna keep coming to the lessons, yeah? I mean, I know that your quirk is suited for the Limelight but you're not half bad at this."

"You really think so? I mean, you're right about my quirk," Midoriya said sheepishly, shrugging a bit in his restraints. "I know that All, I mean, everyone is expecting me to go into Limelight. And I guess it makes sense? But, I, well, I've always liked the thought of going the Underground route. It's just that with my quirk and everything, I didn't think that I could." The last bit was said in a soft, sad voice.

Not for the first time, Shouta really wished that he had met the boy when he was still quirkless. But it didn't matter now. "A quirk is a tool, Problem Child," he reminded the boy dryly, making both teens jump in surprise. They probably had thought that he had been ignoring their conversation. "And while your quirk could easily be used for being a Limelight hero, there is absolutely nothing stopping you from going Underground. You have a good mind, you're quick on your feet, and you're sneaky. You'd be a good Underground hero if you decide to take that route. But it's not something you need to decide until second year when it's time to choose your electives." He stopped at the entrance of the fake city and pulled at the strands that the two boys were wrapped up in, easily untangling them and letting them both stand up. "For now, focus on learning. Whether or not you decide on going Underground, these are all good skills to know."

Midoriya lit up at Shouta's praise and nodded, dipping into a slight bow. "Yes, Sensei," he chirped, grinning at him like the damn sun shone out of his face. He glanced at Shinsou and happily said, "I have so many ideas for the next time we do this! Do you want to come over to the 1-A dorms later to talk about them? Or I could go to the 1-C dorms if you'd feel more comfortable over there?"

Shinsou blinked, pausing halfway in the act of standing up. "You'd be okay with coming to the 1-C dorms? Most hero kids wouldn't be caught dead going there."

Shouta watched in amusement as Midoriya just tilted his head in confusion. Of course, Problem Child wouldn't understand how some hero students felt above the students in the other departments. Undoubtedly, a lot of hero students would be disinclined in going to the general education dorms. "Why? We're all students at Yuuei, aren't we? Besides, it'd be nice to get out of my dorms for a bit. Kacchan and his friends are doing a movie night tonight and things are always loud when they do that."

And while they were on that topic. "Shinsou, run ahead to the gym," Shouta cut in before Shinsou could reply. He jerked his head in the direction of the gym that the two of them primarily used for their training. "Get started on your cool-down exercises. We'll be there in just a few minutes. I need to speak to Midoriya about something."

Shinsou nodded, quickly straightening up. "Right, Aizawa-sensei." He glanced at Midoriya with an unreadable look in his eyes before smirking. "We can head over to my dorms after we change back into our uniforms, Bone Breaker. Can't wait to hear your ideas." He walked towards the gym, leaving Shouta alone with his Problem Child.

Shouta took a second to study Midoriya, taking in the way that the boy seemed a bit more relaxed than he had a few days ago before the conversation that the two of them had had about the letter from one of Midoriya's former bullies, his relationship with Bakugou, and One for All. Midoriya was looking at Shouta nervously but with more trust in his eyes than Shouta had ever seen from his Problem Child. "What did you want to talk to me about, Sensei," he asked, rocking back and forth on his feet. He had his hands clasped in front of him, eyes wide with curiosity.

"I wanted to ask you how things are with you and Bakugou," Shouta said bluntly. There was a time to be gentle and times to be blunt and now was the perfect time to be blunt. He stuck his hands in his pockets and studied Midoriya carefully, looking for any changes in his behaviour. "Has there been any incidents since we last spoke?"

Midoriya stilled, ducking his head shyly and hesitating but ultimately shaking his head. "No, sensei. I've been trying to stay out of his way. And Shouchan, I mean Todoroki, helps me with that." Midoriya grinned a little when he said Todoroki's new nickname, a pleased shine to his eyes. Shouta had heard the nickname a few times in the past few days and was happy to know that Midoriya's conversation with Todoroki had gone well. Even if it was strange

hearing his own nickname being used to refer to someone else. “Kacchan is pretty busy with all the homework that we’ve gotten lately. I mean, we all are. So, um, yeah.” He rubbed the back of his neck uncertainty. “We’ve stayed out of each other’s ways.”

“Good,” Shouta said with a firm nod. “I’m glad. I just wanted to assure you that I haven’t forgotten what I told you at our meeting the other day. I am in the process of dealing with Bakugou.” It was Thursday and tomorrow him and Hizashi would start the process of going through the three years’ worth of security footage. It would take the entire weekend to go over it all. The Principal of Aldera had handed over the incident reports and if the two of them worked together, they would be done combing through everything by Saturday night. “But I’ll need you to tell me if anything happens in the meantime. Immediately. Understand, Problem Child?”

“I understand, sensei.” Midoriya hesitated and Shouta knew what he was about to say before it even came out of his mouth. “He really isn’t as bad as he used to be, sensei, really. I mean, he has friends here. And he’s going to be a really good hero one day. Don’t you think so?”

Shouta sighed and stepped forward, crouching in front of Midoriya with his hands resting on his knees. “Midoriya, I’ve learned a lot in the past few days. I’ve also looked back at several incidents that have happened in the past year. The battle trials, for one. Bakugou tried to kill you, kid. Do you know what would’ve happened if the blast had hit you? You would’ve died.”

“Only if I hadn’t dodged,” Midoriya muttered in a sick parody of what Shouta had heard Bakugou snap at All Might when watching the recording just a few hours ago during his lunch break. “But I did dodge.”

“Yes, you did,” Shouta agreed. “And you still obtained burns that had we not have had Recovery Girl on-site would’ve resulted in you spending time in a hospital. And judging from the scars on your arms, that wasn’t the first time that he’s used his quirk on you.” Anger grew in Shouta’s stomach that forced him to take a deep breath. “Also, he hasn’t stopped in his crusade against you. He still calls you names, still targets you during training with excessive force which results in injuries, and I suspect that the only reason he doesn’t attempt to hurt you in the way that he used to is that he knows that if he tried, he would found himself frozen in a block of ice and then kicked straight into the sun.” He had no doubt about that. Todoroki, Iida, and Urarka

would all kill a man for Problem Child without hesitation, even if Iida would deny it to his own dying day. As long as they didn't do it when they were still at school. Shouta wasn't in the business of covering up murders. Not for his students anyway.

Now if Hizashi or Nemuri ever had a problem that they needed burying well . . . never let it be said that Shouta wasn't as ride and die for them as they were for him.

Midoriya must've known it too because a small smile played on his lips. "Probably," he mumbled softly with a shrug. "I just," he faltered for a moment before whispering, "I don't want to be the reason that he doesn't become a hero."

"You won't be," Shouta said firmly, leaning forward. "If Bakugou doesn't become a hero, that's because of him. It has nothing to do with you." He tilted his head. "Midoriya, take yourself and Bakugou out of the equation for a moment. What would you think if an upper-classman was discovered to have bullied one of their classmates in the past? Their behaviour hasn't changed in the slightest towards them. They still think of them as beneath them and let them know that. Would you think that they're hero material?" Shouta watched as Midoriya's eyes widened and decided to hammer the nail in. "What if they used their quirk on that student?"

The small, choked sound that Midoriya made was of pure horror, the boy gripping his arms tightly. Shouta's Problem Child swallowed before shaking his head. "They wouldn't be a good hero at all, sensei," Midoriya whispered softly.

"Exactly. Let me handle Bakugou. You do, I don't know," Shouta snorted with an exaggerated shrug. "What is it you kids do nowadays? Go to the mall? Try and summon Eldritch Horrors? I'm afraid that I'm a bit out of touch now that I've gotten so old."

The sound of Midoriya's laughter was sudden and erased any anxiety in the boy's expression. "Sensei! You're not old! My mom's older than you!"

Shouta rolled his eyes and stood up, his knees cracking in protest to Midoriya's comment of Shouta not being old. "Every day I deal with you little demons is another year added onto my life," he drawled, jerking his head towards the gym where Shinsou had disappeared to. "Let's go, brat," he said fondly. "You need to do your cool-down exercises."

“Yes, sensei,” Midoriya giggled. He paused though and glanced up at Shouta. “Um, sensei? Before we do, um, do you remember the other thing I came to you about? The letter I got?”

Shouta’s gaze softened. “I’ve already filed the paperwork, Problem Child. You have nothing to worry about on that front.”

“Oh, good. Thank you, Sensei. Sorry, I just, yeah. I just wanted to check.”

“Of course. But you don’t need to worry about it now. I’ve got it well in hand.” Shouta started walking towards the gym, Midoriya on his heels. A sudden thought hit him as he glanced back at Midoriya and remembered the other quirkless person he had almost run into today. If anyone would understand . . . “Midoriya. I have a question for you.”

Midoriya lit up and stumbled forward a little to look at Shouta’s face. “Yes, sensei?”

“Before you got your quirk if someone had stood up for you but wasn’t your friend . . . I mean to say, if they stayed in their lane, and you stayed in yours, but they stepped in to help when they could, would you resent them for not being there more? For not being there more for you?”

Midoriya paused, forcing Shouta to stop and look at the suddenly thoughtful child. Midoriya was holding his chin with one hand and staring at the ground with a pensive expression. Finally, he spoke in a soft voice. “I don’t think so, sensei. I’ve never had people stand up for me before Yuuei. No one cared about the quirkless kid who was being picked on. Some were sympathetic, sure. But none of them stepped in to help. They probably all thought that it didn’t matter in the long run if a quirkless kid was hurt. That it was better me than a Quirked kid.” Shouta stamped the sudden surge of anger *down.* “But if someone had stepped in and done something? Even if they didn’t want to be friends with me? I think . . . I think that still would’ve meant the world to me, sensei.” Midoriya smiled softly, looking a million miles away. “I’d think that that person was a true hero.”

Shouta had a lump in his throat. He swallowed around it and forced himself to start walking again. “C’mon, Problem Child. You need to do your cool-down exercises and I need a pot of coffee.”

The next time that Shouta saw Boukyaku Sakura was just a few hours later when he had gone out to pick up from his radio station. He didn't jump out the window this time.

He was exhausted. Shouta had stopped by his apartment before heading out, throwing on a pair of sweats, and had spent an hour reading Bakugou and Midoriya's extensive file, anger burning in his gut the enter time. It didn't take a genius to figure out that Bakugou had never been taken to task for what he did, but it had been worse than that. The teachers had actively gone against Midoriya, writing that the boy was an attention-seeking child who picked fights. Now, a Problem Child Midoriya may be, but Shouta felt that he knew *which* kind of Problem Child Midoriya was by now. And attention seeking? The boy shied away from attention like it would burn him. And while he may force his way into situations that didn't concern him, it was always to defend someone.

Bakugou's file on the other hand was squeaky clean, not a single thing written on it other than the boy being a *joy* in the class, always helping his fellow students, quiet in the classroom, and basically the opposite of everything that Bakugou actually as. It was like the two files had been switched at one point. The staff at Aldera had sabotaged Midoriya, trying their level best to keep him from going to Yuuei. If it wasn't for All Might speaking for the boy, he would never have made it past the screening process because of his record. But Bakugou? His record was soaked in the teacher's favouritism. It made Shouta's blood boil and forced him to go for a walk before he punched a wall. Bakugou would be dealt with soon. By Monday, he'd be out of Class 1-A altogether. They just needed to check the footage first.

But he had walked into Hizashi's radio station with a bag of takeout in one hand, yawning into the other. It was getting late and, sadly, it looked like it was going to be a late night. He had texted Hizashi saying that he wanted to get an early start on watching the footage from Aldera and Hizashi had agreed. The two of them would be up until the wee hours of the morning going over the incidents logged and seeing if they were logged correctly. Something in Shouta's gut told him that there was going to be a *lot* of incidents marked incorrectly.

But all of that left his mind as he turned into a hallway and saw exactly who Hizashi was talking to. Shouta froze when he saw Sakura, laughing at something Hizashi said, and instinctively stepped into the shadows. His mind went blank like it had that morning, just silent awkward panic. He felt like he was eleven again, wanting to make a

friend but having no idea *how*. How does one do that? How does one reach out? Luckily, he didn't need to. Because Shouta's terrible, awful, jerk of a husband saw him, spilt into a wide grin and waved him over. Drawing Sakura's attention over to him.

She *froze*. For a split second, before a smile graced her face, Sakura looked just as awkward as Shouta felt and it just made Shouta feel like he was in elementary all over again. He could almost hear the whispers of *villain* hissed in his ears and feel the tips of fingers burning his neck.

Shouta swallowed and forced himself to walk forward, gripping his bag of takeout tightly. Trepidation was swirling in his gut and he could barely mutter out a, "Hey, 'Zashi," because of how nervous he was. Hizashi glanced at him in concern, wrapping an arm around Shouta's shoulders and pulling him into his side.

"Boukyaku-san, this is my husband," Hizashi said fondly, squeezing Shouta's arms gently. "If you're going to be Nemuri's assistant, you'll probably see a lot of him. He's-"

"Aizawa-senpai," Sakura cut in, a small smile on her face. There was an unreadable look in her eyes that Shouta, for a split second, read as guilt. What did *she* have to feel guilty for? "It is you, isn't it? It's good to see you again."

Shouta bobbed his head, muttering out, "It is, Boukyaku-san. Likewise. It's been a while."

Hizashi's eyebrows shot up, glancing between the two of them curiously, a little warily. He shot Shouta a look which Shouta ignored, too busy staring at Sakura's shoulder. "The two of you know each other?"

"We went to elementary school together," Sakura supplied, shifting on her feet with a type of energy that was almost anxious in nature. She smiled at Shouta; the smile genuine but coated in the same guilt from before. Why? "I was also watching the sports festival the year that you won. I was rooting for you, Aizawa-senpai."

"You were one of the few that were," Shouta quipped. He stuck his hands in his pockets in an attempt to hide how they shook. "But it's nice to know that someone was. You look well." *Alive*. He glanced at Hizashi and saw that silent reassurance in his eyes. If Shouta felt uncomfortable then they'd leave. Hizashi was good with steamrolling his way out of situations. But Shouta felt a sudden burst of . . .

courage? A need to get it over with before he chickened out again? "Actually, 'Zashi, can you go on ahead to the car? I need to talk to Boukyaku-san here for a minute." He offered his husband the bag of takeout and tried his best to send Hizashi a look that offers him some comfort.

Hizashi glanced between the two of them once more before breaking out into a wide grin. "Alright then. I'll see you another time, hopefully, Boukyaku-san." He took the bag from Shouta and pressed a kiss to his cheek before walking away, his shoes *click click clicking* against the floor as he walked away. Within moments, the two of them were alone in the hallway. It made Shouta think of how he used to hiss at Sakura's bullies to leave her alone when they crowded her in the hallway, teasing her and pushing her against the lockers.

It was silent for a few seconds before Sakura chuckled. "So, not going to jump through a window this time?"

Fucking Goddamn it. She *had* seen that.

"I'm not good with awkward situations," Shouta drawled, looking away and ignoring the flush crawling up his neck. "Especially without warnings. We're just lucky that we were only on the second floor. It would've made things more complicated if we were on the top floor." He rubbed the back of his head awkwardly and shrugged.

Sakura chuckled again. "I remember from elementary. This morning wasn't the first time you jumped out of a window to avoid someone. Remember the first week of elementary? You jumped out a window to avoid some boys from your class."

Oh. That's right. Shouta had done that. So, jumping out of windows was a pattern for him. That was good to know.

There was a pause where Shouta found himself searching for words. When he finally found them, he found himself speaking at the same time as Sakura. "So I-" "Listen-". Shouta's mouth closed with a click and Sakura laughed nervously, twisting her hands in a way that was similar to the way Shouta's Problem Child did when he was anxious. "You go first," Sakura chuckled awkwardly. "What I have to say is probably a bit heavier than what you have to."

Oh, *lovely*. Of course it was. "Fine," Shouta said with a curt nod. He stared at the space above Sakura's left shoulder, too much of a coward to meet her eyes directly. "I wanted to," he sighed, not sure how to word what he wanted to say. He decided to be blunt. "I

wanted to apologize for not doing more for you in elementary school."

"*. . . What?"*

Shouta nodded, not looking at Sakura's face. "I should've," he went on. "I wanted to. You probably didn't know, I know that you had your own things to deal with, but I didn't have many friends back before going to Yuuei. I didn't really know *how* to make friends." Fuck, even now Shouta didn't know how he had gotten the friends he had. "But I wanted to reach out to you. I just didn't know how. I'm sorry." The apology was silted and awkward but Shouta could only hope that Sakura felt the genuineness behind it.

There was a beat of silence before Sakura let out an incredulous bark of laughter. It should've strange coming from such a small woman. "Are you, oh my gosh, you're serious. Aizawa-senpai, you're, I can't believe you."

A pit of despair opened up in Shouta's gut. She didn't forgive him. That was fine, she was under no obligation to. Just like Midoriya was under no obligation to forgive all of the people who bullied him in elementary and middle school, Sakura was under no obligation to forgive him for not doing more. Shouta accepted it and made plans to avoid Nemuri's agency in the future to keep Sakura from being uncomfortable. "It's fine if you can't forgive me," he continued, feeling a little numb. "I should've done more, and I'll never forgive myself for-"

"Stop, just stop." Sakura ran a hand through her hair and looked at Shouta with an incredulous expression that she *must've* learnt from Nemuri. "Aizawa-senpai, I was about to apologize to *you."*

Shouta froze, staring at her for a long moment before letting out a dry, "*What?"*

Sakura laughed, shaking her head. "Oh my God. Aizawa-senpai, you were the only person in that school who didn't treat me like shit. Everyone, even the teachers, treated me like I was beneath them. You were the only one who didn't. You stood up for me. Hell, you got help for me when I was hurt."

"I just did what anyone else would've," Shouta denied. He felt off footed not, unsure about what exactly was going on. He had never thought that this was where the conversation would go.

"No, you didn't. Two people walked past me before you came.

They didn't do anything to help me. You did." Sakura let out a small, sad smile. "I always regretted not standing up for you as you did for me. Or not trying to become friends with you. I wanted to. My Uncle told me back then that I should, that you were probably just shy. And I knew that you were."

Shouta shied back in his capture scarf, mumbling, "I'm not shy."

Sakura arched an eyebrow. "You jump out of windows to avoid people on a regular basis."

Point.

"But, the point is, I wanted to try and make friends back then," Sakura continued, softening her tone a little. "Or step in when the kids in your class called you a villain. I should've but I was too scared. I didn't want to be targeted more than I already was. I should've stepped up."

"I should've done more," Shouta countered. "If they knew that we were friends, maybe they never would've pushed you down those stairs." It was something that haunted Shouta some nights. Maybe if they knew that the *villain* of the school was friends with Sakura, they would've been too scared to mess with her.

Sakura rolled her eyes. "Yes, they would've. Aizawa-senpai, those kids would've hurt me in spite of whatever you or I or anyone did." She reached out and placed a hand on Shouta's arm. For a second, Shouta felt like they really were those elementary school kids again, only this time they were actually reaching out to each other, finding common ground and trying to make friends. "But you tried to stop them. Eating lunch with you was the only times I ever felt safe in that place because I knew that you would never let them hurt me. I wasn't surprised when I saw you competing in the Sports Festival. In my eyes, you were always a hero. I'm just glad that Yuuei saw it that way too."

. . . *Goddammit,* Problem Child had infected Shouta with his endless tears. This was his fault. Shouta pushed back the burning in his eyes and forced himself to look away. He didn't know what to say to that heartfelt admission, so it didn't surprise him when the next words out of his mouth were completely random. "I have a boy in my class now that grew up quirkless. He's not, he was one of those that repressed his quirk and was misdiagnosed. But he only got his quirk recently. He grew up quirkless before that."

“Poor kid,” Sakura murmured, squeezing his arm before pulling back. “How’s he adjusting to being quirked?”

Shouta snorted, blinking away the leftover tears. “As well as expected. He’s working hard to get control of it. He’s a good kid. Still considers himself quirkless.”

“I would too if I was in his spot. Fourteen years of isolation and discrimination doesn’t just disappear.” Sakura paused and offered shyly, “I could talk to him? If you’d be okay with that. It took me years to ever meet another Quirkless person and it helped when I finally did. Or I could give you the information of a late bloomer that I know.”

Shouta considered it briefly before shrugging. Maybe. Not now. This may be Sakura, but it had been twenty years since they had talked to each other. There would have to be some trust built between the two before Shouta allowed her to visit his Problem Child. “Maybe. Not now though. The kid’s going through a lot at the moment.” He paused before pulling out an old wrinkled business card from his pink sweats and offered it to Sakura. “Here, Boukyaku-san. My phone number. If you’d ever like to get coffee or something.”

Sakura smiled and took the card, tucking it away in her pants pocket. “I’d like that. You should come over to my house sometime. My daughter would love to meet you, I’m sure.”

Shouta blinked in surprise. “You’re a mother?” He didn’t know why that surprised him. She was only two years younger than him and Shouta’s thirty-first birthday was coming up. Most people his age had kids. Mainly his surprise came from Shouta feeling like a kid himself most days.

“I am,” Sakura said with a fond smile. “Her name’s Shouko. She’s six now and the light of my life. She got her quirk just last week.” Her expression softened. “It would never have mattered to me if she never got one but I’m glad that she did. If only so she won’t have to grow up the way I did. The way your student did.”

Shouta thought of starburst scars, a broken leg, and teachers who never believed those without powers in their veins and nodded. “I’m working to shut down the schools that my student came from. They’ll never open their doors again after I’m done, Boukyaku-san.” A slightly deranged grin grew on his face at the thought of what he planned for the Aldera middle and elementary schools. He’d be having

a meeting with Nezu later on in the week to speak of it. Judging from the sudden text that he had gotten from the stoat earlier in the day saying that he was looking forward to seeing what Shouta brought him, Nezu had an idea on what the meeting would be about. And like a cat presenting a dead mouse to its owner, Shouta planned on dropping off the footage and incident reports at Nezu's desk along with reports from him and Hizashi of what *actually* happened in the footage. Nezu would be thrilled with the chance to burn another corrupt school to the ground. Shouta might even get a raise.

Sakura grinned back, grin just as deranged and petty as Shouta's. "*Good.* And, please Senpai, call me Sakura."

A warm feeling grew in Shouta's stomach and he nodded. "Shouta."

"I hate people," Shouta muttered, striking through another incident report (*Midoriya provoked Bakugou and other students, causing an incident in class. He was sent to the Principal's office for discipline.)* and wrote down what actually happened (*Midoriya walked into the classroom and Bakugou and two other students called him names before Bakugou used his quirk on Midoriya's arm, leaving behind a small burn. The teacher walked in and sent Midoriya to the Principal's office for discipline after telling him off for supposedly provoking the others. Bakugou and the other students were let off without comment.)*. He was curled up on his old, stained couch with Hizashi, the two of them with their laptops out and going through the footage from Aldera. It was just as bad as Shouta had feared. There hadn't been an incident report so far that Shouta and Hizashi hadn't rewritten. They were only halfway through the incident reports and Shouta could only count himself lucky that, so far anyway, he hadn't seen Bakugou put a red spider lily on Midoriya's desk. "I really do. I think that's my natural state of being."

Hizashi hummed, striking through his own incident report with his blue sparkly pen. "I don't know. I think you have a lot of love in you, Kitten."

"Doesn't mean that I don't hate people," Shouta muttered, flushing from the petname. He adjusted his position, his feet tucked between Hizashi and the back of the couch. "How much would be different if Problem Child had gotten a decent teacher? The kid doesn't trust any teacher, not one."

Hizashi smirked, glancing up from the screen and to his husband. “I wouldn’t say *every teacher.* He trusts you. He trusted you enough to tell you about being a false negative.”

Shouta hummed at that. He needed to talk to Midoriya about bringing Hizashi in on the secret. Hizashi had a talent for helping kids with uncontrollable quirks. Midoriya’s Full Cowling technique was good. Shouta had no doubt that Hizashi could make it even *better*. He could do it without all the information but having it would help. “Fine. He half trusts one teacher. But I’m hardly the end all be all. Whenever the kid cries, which is a *lot*, I have no idea what to do. I’d normally push crying kids off to you or Nemuri, but I can’t do that with Problem Child. I need to deal with,” he wrinkled his nose, “*feelings.*”

“Oh, how *terrible,*” Hizashi drawled, reaching out and squeezing Shouta’s calf gently. “I think that you do fine, Shouchan. The kid trusts you and we both know how hard it can be for kids to trust people after they’ve been hurt all their lives.” Now that it was just the two of them, the makeup that Hizashi used to hide the thin scars on his cheeks had been wiped away, allowing Shouta to see the scars left by a muzzle strapped on too tightly by a teacher that had been sued so hard by Hizashi’s parents that it had made nation wide news and the reason why using muzzles on kids with voice quirks was criminal today. “If the kid didn’t trust you, he never would’ve come to you about any of this. We wouldn’t be going through all this footage right now and I wouldn’t be getting a new student.”

Shouta hummed as he moved onto another incident report, putting the last one to the side. “You don’t know that you’ll be getting a new student. I may be expelling Bakugou outright. After all of this, I’d be well within my right to. Either way, he won’t be staying in the heroics department.” And he wouldn’t be allowed back without his attitude doing a 180° turn and facing the consequences for his actions. Therapy, community service, and that were just off the top of his head. He’d have to have a parent-teacher’s meeting with the Bakugou’s soon to discuss the rest of it too. “I’ll be speaking to Nezu about it later. Tomorrow, if we can get this all done tonight. He knows about this.” Nezu had shown up at their apartment a few hours prior with a sharp grin and a few extra incident reports that the Aldera Principal had *neglected* to give to Shouta. “I didn’t tell him yet, but it doesn’t surprise me that he knew.”

Little rat probably knew about One for All all along. It wouldn’t surprise Shouta in the slightest. But, Shouta doubted that Nezu knew

anything about the harassment that Midoriya had faced. The Principal may be a lot of things, but an enabler of abuse was not one of them. The rat would no doubt help Shouta reign hell upon Aldera. Hell, Shouta was probably gonna get vacation time along with his raise.

"Of *course,* he does," Hizashi sighed, shaking his head. He pursed his lips at what he saw on his laptop screen and Shouta glanced over. His vision went red for a brief moment when he saw a group of kids snickering as they placed red spider lilies on Midoriya's desk. Bakugou wasn't among them but that didn't give Shouta much comfort. This was the third time they've seen Midoriya's class do this to him since they've started going through the footage. And not once did a teacher do anything to stop them. Aldera was going to *burn*. "Bakugou can't stay in heroics after all this. If he had been showing remorse for all of his actions then maybe but . . ."

Shouta nodded curtly, clenching his jaw.

There was a moment of silence as the two men went through their incident reports before Hizashi spoke up, curiously. "So, how'd your talk with Boukyaku go?"

Shouta hummed, starting up the next video. "Fine."

"You wanna talk about it?"

"Not really," Shouta hummed with a shrug, tapping his pen against the page. He scowled and scratched through the incident report (*Midoriya hurt himself*) and wrote out the correct vision (*Bakugou and Yagami Enji cornered Midoriya in the hallway and Yagami Eni scratched his elongated nails across Midoriya's neck.*) "We went to elementary school together for a month, we were both bullied, and we both felt like shit for not doing more for each other. That's it. We're friends now. She's taking me to coffee on Monday."

Hizashi actually looked up at that in surprise. "Huh. Well, better version of events than what I was thinking."

"What were you thinking?"

"When I realized that she knew your name? Jealous ex or something like that."

Shouta wished that could've just been Hizashi being ridiculous but it had happened before, with both of their respective exes.

He shook his head. “No. We talked things out. She’s doing good. Like I said, we’re doing coffee on Monday.” Hopefully, Monday would be a good day. Bakugou out of his class, Shinsou taking his spot, and coffee with a new friend. Shouta just had to get through all of the footage first.

Hizashi smiled and reached out, squeezing Shouta’s hand gently. “I’m glad. You seem lighter now that you talked to her.”

Shouta’s lips twitched up a little and he squeezed back before turning his focus back to the security footage. He needed to concentrate on this for now. If he wanted his perfect Monday.

He could already taste the coffee.

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